

## Protagonist Corner

Frederick W. Schmidt

Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois

Long before we became good friends, I was introduced to Marcus Borg's work as a student at Oxford University. I was beginning my own work on a degree in New Testament studies (which I completed in 1986), and I was working with George Bradford Caird. Caird held the Dean Ireland's Chair at The Queen's College, and he had established himself as one of the leading voices in New Testament studies in the tradition of C.H. Dodd.<sup>1</sup>

As I began working on the relationship between eschatology and ethics, Caird told me that I should consult the work of a former student, Marcus J. Borg. Borg, he noted, had written a brilliant thesis, and he thought that I would benefit from spending some time with it. This was long before Mellen Press published Marc's dissertation<sup>2</sup> and years before he dominated conversations about the historical Jesus.<sup>3</sup>

That was 1980. Borg became the Hundere Distinguished Professor of Religion and Culture at Oregon State University in 1979. He published his dissertation in 1984, and Caird died in April of the same year, unaware of the impact that his distinguished student would one day have on the landscape of historical Jesus studies and beyond.

Today, Marcus is one of the most influential New Testament scholars of his generation, and with good reason. He possesses the critical tools to analyze the challenges associated with reading the biblical text. He has developed a compelling narrative describing the ministry of Jesus. And he communicates the results of his scholarship in a fashion that engages a circle of readers far beyond the biblical studies guild.

Those gifts alone could account for his influence. But his ability to address our culture's discomfort with the biblical message and the Christian faith has been the key to his success. He is masterful in naming that discomfort. He is adept at prescribing an alternative, and he is generous to his detractors in public discourse.

It is not surprising, then, that those who are drawn to Marc's work credit him with having developed an approach to the "progressive" Christian message that gives them confidence in its continued viability.<sup>4</sup> Nor is it surprising that preachers, pastors, and priests rely on his work to frame their own case for the Gospel's relevance.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many of Borg's most widely read works consciously invite that conversation, particularly *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*,<sup>6</sup> *The God We Never Knew*,<sup>7</sup> *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*,<sup>8</sup> *The Heart of Christianity*,<sup>9</sup> *Living the Heart of Christianity*,<sup>10</sup> and the blog that he writes in retirement at Patheos.com.<sup>11</sup>

As such, Marc's work is that of an "accidental" apologist. I say "accidental" because to my knowledge he has never used the label to describe his work, and I suspect that he would resist its use. But his gifts are, nonetheless, those of an apologist. His work has an apologetic cast, and his readers see and use his work in that fashion. For preachers in particular, it is also worth thinking about Marc's conclusions through the lens of apologetics. It allows us to make foundational observations that get at the logic and focus of his scholarship as well as the likely impact of his work on the preacher's craft.

### *The Rhetoric of Borg's Apologetic*

Looked at in that light, the first thing one notices in Marc's work is the shift in the logic of his argument as compared with earlier generations of apologists. Historically, an apologist typically sees his or her task as that of explaining the Gospel in ways that vindicate the church's faith in terms that are comprehensible to the contemporary culture. For that reason, even though apologetic methods can vary greatly, historically apologists have begun by presuming the truth of the Christian message and some sort of deficiency in assumptions made by those who would doubt its truth.<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, Marc assumes that some sort of deficiency in the Christian faith exists that is underlined by the changes in modern intellectual paradigms. He offers an alternative means of construing the Christian faith, and then he offers that construal as a means of continuing to live with integrity as a Christian in the modern world.<sup>13</sup> Every apologist defends a slightly different version of Christianity, of course, and speaks to different audiences.<sup>14</sup> But in Marc's case, the apologetic begins not with the legitimacy of the Christian faith as he sees it, but with what is cast as the dominant and defective views of his fundamentalist past. In *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, that past is the Jesus of "pre-critical naiveté" that Marc's childhood church taught him to embrace.<sup>15</sup> In *The God We Never Knew*, it is the faith of his childhood: "doctrinal, moralistic, literalistic, exclusivistic, and oriented toward an afterlife."<sup>16</sup> In *The Heart of Christianity*, it is "an earlier paradigm" of the Christian faith,<sup>17</sup> "grounded in divine authority" and dependent upon a view of the Bible as "a divine product,"<sup>18</sup> that adheres to a view of the Christian faith in which "believing" and "the afterlife" are central, and this life is all about "requirements and rewards."<sup>19</sup>

There is nothing sacrosanct about the older pattern used by apologists, and one could argue that there is a certain genius in a rhetorical ploy that acknowledges the flaws in some forms of Christianity. Marc's approach exhibits humility that tracks well in the contemporary world. He wins and galvanizes progressive Christians by sketching a picture of the faith from which they already feel alienated. And by citing what he found problematic in his own experience of the church, Marc connects easily with readers who had a similar experience. But the way in which he deploys this rhetorical gambit also has weaknesses that the preacher who follows his lead should note.

*One: Marc relies heavily on stereotyping of a Christian perspective that, where it exists, is historically representative of a small minority.*

I've known some of the Christians that Marc uses as a foil for his apologetic, but it is hardly fair to suggest that the kind of thinking he outlines dominated the church until Progressive Christianity came along. The Christian tradition is a global, wide-ranging, and complex phenomenon covering more than two millennia. Protestant fundamentalism is both a relatively recent and relatively small part of that story, even if it looms large in some parts of the United States.<sup>20</sup>

As such, the polemic Marc uses paints the whole of the Christian tradition from a narrowly eccentric point of view that might be Marc's experience and might be the experience of a number of Americans, but it hardly represents the history of the Christian tradition, and it doesn't accurately represent the Christian faith. So, while the rhetorical ploy that Marc uses resonates with many of his readers, it also reinforces and projects a picture of the Christian tradition that distorts the tradition and

reduces it to an eccentric interpretation that makes an apology for the Christian faith that much harder to offer.

*Two: The logic of Marc's argument also overplays the originality of Progressive Christianity.*

If American fundamentalism is a relatively new and small part of Christian history, Progressive Christianity is an even smaller part of that history.<sup>21</sup> So, when Marc begins to classify Christian belief in terms of "earlier" (i.e., fundamentalist views) versus "newer" (i.e., Progressive views), the complexity of Christianity is lost in the simple polarities around which much of his work revolves. The historical possibilities disappear from sight, and the subtlety of two millennia of Christian thought is reduced to two fairly simple alternatives.

At best the resulting picture is narrowly reductionistic. At worst it is a misleading caricature. In either case, the alternative on offer does the Christian tradition as much harm as good, leaving readers the thinnest of interpretations, lacking in historical depth and the sophistication that the history of the church offers. There has been some fine work done by Progressive Christians, Marc's work among them. But, contrary to the claims by the movement, Christianity has hardly found its first, intellectually honest expression in its Progressive form.

Far from being opposed to critical and scientific thought (as Marc and other Progressives seem to imply), Christianity made the Enlightenment possible.<sup>22</sup> So while the church's record is far from pristine, it can hardly be argued that it has been uniformly resistant to the intellectual values that have shaped western history. Nor can it be argued that Christianity has, at long last, only recently embraced critical thought in its Progressive and Protestant manifestation.

From the preacher's point of view, this is anything but a purely academic or historical issue. When trying to articulate the Christian faith or provide a reason for embracing it, that task is made harder by stereotyping the past or by narrowing the rich tradition from which one might draw. To be sure, the church's history is marked by shortcomings, as is any great tradition, be it religious, political, social, economic, or philosophical. But the rhetorical gambit that Marc uses paints the whole of the tradition using its weakest examples while making the assumption that the tradition has little or nothing to offer apart from its own fairly recent contribution.

*Three: The weight of the apologetic ultimately advocates for modernity, not for the Christian faith.*

When one recognizes this shift to a hermeneutic of suspicion toward the Christian message, it becomes clear that the weight of Marc's apologetic defends modernity, not the Gospel. If the "earlier" way of thinking about the Christian faith was flat, simplistic, reactionary, and easily dismissed with a few pages of caricature, then the one intellectual commitment that escapes suspicion and occupies the critic's seat is modernity itself, or at least, a loose assemblage of what it means to be thoughtful and modern. From there Marc assesses the old way of thinking about the Christian faith, identifies its obvious flaws, and then offers a re-construal of Christianity that conforms with modernity's values.<sup>23</sup>

This shift in gravity ought to give preachers who take their vocation seriously some pause for thought. Pastors, priests, and ministers are called to radical honesty,

and they should defend an understanding of the Christian faith that acknowledges the truth, whatever it is and wherever it is found. But granted that a preacher has also made a commitment to the Gospel, why would she then embrace a theological position that privileges modernity instead of the Gospel?

Preachers should also note that Marc's apologetic fails to ask how the Christian tradition might critique modernity. Instead, it emphasizes how the Christian faith might accommodate itself to the modern mindset. In trying too hard to make Christianity acceptable to modernity, we are as far from the ancient approach to apologetics as we can possibly be. The hallmark of the church's apologetic has been its ability to allow the Gospel to draw the world in which we live into question. Marc's approach takes the validity of our culture's worldview as a given.

The Christian tradition's ability to speak in a relevant fashion to the challenges that face every new generation is one of its great strengths. But the Christian faith also urges us to listen to the transcendent challenge of God. The key to a vital, contemporary Christian faith does not lie in simply taking into account what we have learned from scientific inquiry, for example. It also requires that we let God speak to us in ways that challenge the underlying assumptions of our "modern mindset." The best of Christian critiques of any culture have always come when the church did its best to stand outside of and alongside of the culture in question.<sup>24</sup> There really isn't room for that deeper critique in Marc's gambit, and it is largely missing from what he writes.<sup>25</sup>

### *The Underlying Assumptions of Borg's Apologetic*

Rhetoric is not the only dimension of Marc's work that is worth evaluating. The underlying assumptions of his work merit scrutiny as well. Three closely related assumptions are worth mentioning here, and George Caird's influence is in clear evidence.

#### *One: the primacy of the political*

Like Caird, Marc helpfully observes that much of what Jesus taught and said had a political dimension, political, that is, because so much of what Jesus said had implications not just for the individual, but for the life of the people of God.<sup>26</sup> That distinction helps explain why Jesus' message has such obvious corporate and social significance. It also illuminates the differences that Jesus had with his contemporaries.<sup>27</sup> But the emphasis Marc places on the political can be misleading in interpreting the significance of Jesus' teaching for the contemporary reader.

To be sure, the corporate language in Jesus' teaching takes the leading edge in the Gospels, but as with the prophets, the social does not exclude the individual or transcendent. Nor do we live in the political environment in which either Jesus or the early church found themselves living. We do not live in a theocracy. Jesus did, or at the very least, he lived in a nation that was *meant* to be a theocracy. To make matters more complicated, the Romans had also robbed Israel of its autonomy in significant ways.

The situation of the church was very different from ours as well. The early church was first a sect within a sect, then a sect in its own right, and finally an institution.<sup>28</sup> But at no point on that journey did the church live in the same relationship to the body politic that we live in today. The church could not and did not vote or exercise

political influence; and it is clear from most of the New Testament that just as ancient Israel had thought of itself as one in the same with the people of God, the church also thought of itself in those terms.

So, to talk about politics in contemporary America is not the same thing as the conversation between Jesus and his contemporaries, nor does the application of Jesus' teaching to our political setting accomplish the goals that Jesus or his contemporaries envisioned. It is not at all clear that the church's exercise of influence over national and global affairs comes at all close to accomplishing the task set for the church or the followers of Jesus by any part of the New Testament.

That fact alone should give preachers pause in giving themselves to a proclamation fixed on the politics of our day that lacks a transcendent and divine word to the church. Ministers, priests, and preachers should also take note of the way in which, having acknowledged the political dimension of the Gospel for much of Progressive Christianity, the Gospel has become merely political.<sup>29</sup>

### *Two: The metaphorical nature of eschatological language*

There is perhaps no single kind of theological language that has generated more confusion than eschatological language. George Caird distinguished himself as an advocate of a nuanced approach to its interpretation, observing that it was often used metaphorically; that is, eschatological language is language used to describe the consequences of decisions made about an event that is not the end.<sup>30</sup>

This observation was so important to Caird's work that it was often difficult to know what role "the end" actually played in the biblical text. In a private conversation, I once asked George if all eschatological language was metaphorical, then what did the language of Daniel 12:1-2 describe? He responded in what seemed to be a bit of special pleading, "Sometimes the ultimate referent becomes so real, it leaps to the forefront."<sup>31</sup>

In Marc's case, there is less ambiguity. Reacting to dispensationalism and popular, flat-footed readings of eschatological language, Marc makes it clear that he believes that eschatological language is "more-than-literal" in nature.<sup>32</sup> Touching the question of an "afterlife," he is, by his own testimony, "agnostic."<sup>33</sup> He is fairly sure that the tomb was not empty, and the resurrection means that Jesus is still experienced in the world today as Lord, recruiting for the Kingdom.<sup>34</sup>

I share Marc's discomfort with the bald and "unbiblical" appropriation of eschatological language that dominates the work of John Nelson Darby, Hal Lindsey, Tim LaHaye, and others.<sup>35</sup> And there is certainly good reason for a measure of what Marc describes as "agnosticism" about the specifics of the Resurrection and "the afterlife." In fact, I would argue that the term "afterlife" is itself an unfortunate turn of phrase, and it biases the conversation about the place of eschatology in the Christian faith.

The New Testament describes eternal life as both present and future possession (see John's Gospel). It emphasizes the continuity of both the old and new heaven and earth (see the Book of Revelation), and both dimensions of the eschatological future depend upon the vindication of the claim that Jesus Christ is Lord. The notion of an "afterlife" as a realm of existence that is unrelated to this world except as reward or punishment is threaded through with connotations that have little or nothing to do with Christian expectation.

But, contrary to Marc's blithe acceptance that the tomb was probably not empty,

the writers of the New Testament clearly believe that it was. They plainly anticipate a bodily resurrection. They look forward to a new heaven and new earth that shares some measure of continuity with current versions of both. And in more than one place, the New Testament is emphatic about the importance of it all.<sup>36</sup>

There is, then, more to eschatological expectation in both Scripture and the Christian tradition than what Marc describes as the “literal-factual” preachments of evangelists who long to scare the hell out of others.<sup>37</sup> The resurrection is, in fact, all about God’s claim to be God, and without it, we are without hope.<sup>38</sup>

### *The primacy of faith as heartfelt devotion over the content of faith*

More recently, a third assumption that has surfaced in Marc’s work gives precedence to the primacy of faith as heartfelt devotion and commitment over belief in the content of the Christian faith.<sup>39</sup> This is a distinction he further bolsters by distinguishing “assent” (meaning, I give my heart to this) from a “propositional belief” that he characterizes as inevitable belief in a set of “literal-factual” truths.<sup>40</sup> At first blush this emphasis avoids the dogmatism of fundamentalism, and theologically it underwrites interfaith tolerance, a point that Marc is repeatedly at pains to make.<sup>41</sup>

However, while there is some support for Marc’s argument in the Old and New Testament, the evidence he adduces to make his point is misleading. It is true that much of the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary behind our use of the words *faith* and *believe* connotes the *act* of trust or a *disposition* of heartfelt commitment. But both Testaments talk about that act of trust against a religious background that emphasizes the importance of God’s identity. Judaism and Christianity are exclusivistic religions that define their God as distinct from the gods of other religions, and that God is repeatedly defined not just in what might be described as metaphorical, ethical, and historical categories, but in the dogmatic categories that Borg implies are secondary, if not unnecessary.<sup>42</sup>

Additionally, what Marc suggests is psychologically and spiritually impossible if one is going to talk at all about a relationship with God. No one in their right mind would assent to an intimate relationship with someone who said, “I love you, but I don’t know who you are and it doesn’t matter.”

This may require a more creative approach to religious tolerance and diversity. The essence of both spiritual and intellectual maturity is the ability to embrace specific convictions in the face of unanswered questions and differences of opinion. To acknowledge the particularity of our faith is also fundamentally more honest about the character of Christianity and about the religious convictions of others.

### *Borg, the Progressive Apologetic, and Today’s Pulpit*

That a preacher’s careful assessment of Marc’s work might raise questions about an uncritical embrace of Progressive Christianity should be no surprise.<sup>43</sup> The problems with that apologetic help to explain why Progressive Christianity has struggled to capture the hearts and minds of those who are spiritual but not religious and why it largely remains a movement dominated by the Boomer Generation.<sup>44</sup> An approach to the Christian faith that lionizes modernity’s conceits and reduces the Christian faith to a series of metaphors describing a largely political undertaking is finally without a good reason for religion, never mind God. All Christians should suffer a *frisson* of warning whenever their faith commitments make them more comfortable with

themselves and the world around them.

Perhaps that is why Progressive Christianity contrasts with earlier reform movements in the church in a fashion that is analogous to the contrast between Marc's apologetic and his predecessors. If Marc's approach stands the Christian apologetic on its head, accommodating the Christian faith to modernity, it ought not be surprising that Progressive Christianity does not seek to renew a martyr's commitment to the Christian faith (as did early monasticism or the leaders of the Reformation), but seeks instead to make its adherents comfortable with modernity.<sup>45</sup>

For today's preacher, that is good reason for a critical reappraisal of the Progressive agenda. Built as it is on the rhetoric of false polarities and misleading assumptions about the nature of the Christian faith, there is good reason to be circumspect. Appropriated without thinking the modern preacher is more likely to find herself defending a loose constellation of modern conceits than anything robust enough to be described as the Word of God. Whatever one might do with the modern pulpit, one hopes that the preacher who stands there would offer more.

### *A Concluding Note*

I have no doubt that my dear friend is not attempting to subvert the preacher or betray the church. Far from it, I know him to be a conscientious and caring scholar and Christian who also feels that he has followed the inevitable logic of the evidence available to him. So, why do I question so much that is at the heart of his work? Marc once observed during an on-line debate with blogger and scholar Tony Jones that perhaps the problem that the two of them faced in their debate is that they are both enmeshed in materialist assumptions about the world around them.<sup>46</sup> That, I believe, is not only true, but it is, in the final analysis, the problem with Marc's apologetic for modernity.

As long as we believe even subconsciously that the "most real" thing about reality or the truth that must be acknowledged is that which can be felt, smelled, touched, seen, or measured, *and* as long as we refuse to see the material dimension of our lives as the creation of the Triune God, we will never win through to a distinctively Christian understanding of the world around us. We will always resort to cartoon-like visions of God (*à la* fundamentalism) or take refuge in Marc's notion that the "newer" truth is "more-than-literal," a phrase that takes its cues from materialism itself and grafts on the spiritual. And, as long as we erase most of the Christian past by creating a stark choice between modern fundamentalism and Progressivism and lumping all pre-twentieth century Christianity in with fundamentalism, we will lack the theological resources to find a distinctively Christian perspective on our world and our lives.

The choice between the strawman of wooden fundamentalism and the shining savior of Progressive Christianity is a false one, and the far richer alternatives are excluded from the debate. While, for example, it has not always been at the vanguard of modern learning, the Eastern Orthodox tradition has also not suffered through the same tension with modern learning, in part because it does not embrace the same materialist assumptions. Without resorting to panentheism or process theology, the Orthodox believe that the Triune God brought the world into being and sustains it. As such, there is no absolute divide between the material world and the spiritual. Both are, instead, the domain in which God lives and moves and has being.<sup>47</sup> That, it seems

to me, is a far better starting point for both a Christian worldview and apologetic.

### Notes

1 See: Henry Chadwick, "George Bradford Caird 1917-1984," *The Gory of Christ in the New Testament, Studies in Christology*, eds., L.D. Hurst and N.T. Wright (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1987), xvii-xxvii.

2 Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness & Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1984).

3 Marc has written or co-authored nineteen books. He has edited or co-edited three others and his work has been translated into eleven languages. *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994) is the best-selling book written about Jesus by a contemporary New Testament scholar. See: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/about/>.

4 As one reader of Marc's column observes, "The way you explain things, Marcus, makes it so much easier for me to be an honest follower of Christ." Marc's audience often expresses sentiments of this kind. See, for example, <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/11/what-is-the-gospel/>.

5 In a poll surveying the most influential voices among the clergy in The United Church of Canada, Marcus Borg was number one. See: <http://www.ucobserver.org/faith/2011/07/theologians/>

6 See above, endnote 3.

7 Marcus J. Borg, *The God We Never Knew: Beyond Dogmatic Religion to a More Authentic Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997).

8 Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but not Literally* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).

9 Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

10 Marcus J. Borg and Tim Scorer, *Living the Heart of Christianity: A Guide to Putting Your Faith into Action* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2006).

11 <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/>

12 Given the purpose of this article, I do not wade into the debate about how apologetic works should be classified, although I am largely in agreement with those who believe that they should be classified more according to their purpose than their genre. On that subject, see: Anders-Christian Jacobsen, "Apologetics and Apologies—Some Definitions," in *Continuity and Discontinuity in Early Christian Apologetics*, eds., Jörg Ulrich, Anders-Christian Jacobsen, Maijastina Kahlos, *Early Christianity in the Context of Antiquity* 5 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), 5-22.

13 See below.

14 That has been true from the beginning. See: F.F. Bruce, "Paul's Apologetic and the Purpose of Acts," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library*, 89:2 (1987): 389-90.

15 *Meeting Jesus Again*, 3ff.

16 *The God We Never Knew*, 1ff.

17 *Heart of Christianity*, xif.

18 *Ibid.*, 7.

19 *Ibid.*, 10.

20 David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 23ff.

21 There is no useful history of what is now described as Progressive Christianity. It is an amalgamation of Bultmann's emphasis on demythologizing Scripture, Process Theology, and classical American liberalism. As some describe it, it is post-liberal and post-modern in its inspiration. See: Roger Wolsey, *Kissing Fish, Christianity for People Who Don't Like Christianity* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2011). As named, its current architects are largely American Baby Boomers whose efforts to define their movement is scarcely fifty years old:

<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Progressive-Christianity-a-Theological-Movement-Bruce-Epperly-06-13-2011.html>)

Even the label "Progressive" continues to be a matter of debate:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2011/06/17/is-progressive-the-right-term/>).

22 See: Marcello Pera, *Why We Should Call Ourselves Christians: The Religious Roots of Free Societies*, trans., L.B. Lappin (New York: Encounter Books, 2008).

23 See above.

- 24 To coin a phrase: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God” (Ro 12:2).
- 25 It is also worth remembering that, while the modern western mindset has much to commend it, the rest of the world does not necessarily share our point of view, nor will the “modern” western mindset as we know it continue to be “modern.” It will inevitably be replaced by a perspective that considers us quaint and naïve in our way and our version of modernity is just as much a social construction as those points of view that we consider an artifact of the past.
- 26 See: Borg, *Conflict, Holiness & Politics*, 2ff. The same argument is made in a newer edition: Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 22ff., the major difference being that Marcus now sifts that analysis through the lens of cross-cultural studies in politics and economics (see pp. 10ff).
- 27 Borg, *Conflict Holiness & Politics*, 51ff and in the new edition, 66ff.
- 28 I am unable to locate the original reference, but I am fairly sure that I owe this characterization of the church’s history to Norman Perrin.
- 29 Not always reliable, but an excellent indication of where a movement is headed that is as new as Progressive Christianity, is this description in Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive\\_Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Progressive_Christianity)
- 30 G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), 243ff.
- 31 I confess that at the time I didn’t have the courage to tell him that I thought it was, so I have no idea how he would have responded.
- 32 Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power – And How They Can Be Restored* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2011): 189ff. The phrase “more-than-literal” invites the reader to equate Marc’s position with “only metaphorical.” Marc would probably object to that equation. But the phrase he uses invites the interpretation “the literal doesn’t matter very much.” Either way, the critic is placed at a disadvantage.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 197ff.
- 34 See, for example, Marc’s response to Tony Jones: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/10/response-to-tony-jones-about-the-resurrection/>
- 35 *Ibid.*, 189-191. And I’ve taken issue with them; see: *Conversations with Scripture: Revelation* (Harrisburg: Morehouse Publishing, 2005), 1-15 and “Leaving Behind Left Behind.” *Congregations* (Spring, 2007): 6-11.
- 36 There is not space to make this argument here, but see for example: Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 2002), 91ff.
- 37 Borg, *Speaking Christian*, especially 5-33.
- 38 Cf. 1 Co 15:12ff. and He 2:14-18.
- 39 See, for example, his reflection on the question, “What is a Christian?” in his blog at Patheos: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/11/what-is-a-christian/>
- 40 Borg, *Heart of Christianity*, 25ff.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 The distinction that Marc makes here is not unlike the effort to determine whether Paul believed that Christians were saved by baptism or by faith. The distinction is one that would not have occurred to Paul. He couldn’t have imagined being baptized without believing, nor could he imagine believing without being baptized. Hence, he uses the two interchangeably to describe a single experience. I think the issue here is much the same. The notion that one could give his or her heart to the teachings of Christ and not believe certain things about Christ, or believe certain things about Christ and not give her or his heart to Christ would not have occurred to an ancient follower.
- 43 Most of Marc’s apologetic, both in style and in content, has become central to the logic of Progressive Christian belief, and his work has been closely linked to its development.
- 44 To my knowledge there isn’t any solid demographic information on the age of the average Progressive Christian. That isn’t surprising. I am told by a recently retired demographer for the United Methodist Church that there are not solid statistics for the demographics of most churches. But most (not all) of the movement’s architects certainly seem to be from the Boomer Generation (or older).
- 45 On the focus of early monasticism, see: George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 1.
- 46 The exchange was fairly lengthy. It started here, with a passing observation by Tony Jones:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2013/10/04/no-the-writers-of-the-bible-did-not-expect-it-to-be-taken-literally-questions-that-haunt/>

Which prompted this response from Marcus:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/10/response-to-tony-jones-about-the-resurrection/>

A rejoinder from Tony:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2013/10/09/dear-marcus-borg-please-reconsider-the-resurrection/>

Yet another response from Marc:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/marcusborg/2013/10/continuing-the-resurrection-conversation/>

And a brief up-date at the end of Tony's earlier article:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/tonyjones/2013/10/09/dear-marc>

47 Cf. Dan Chițoiu, "The Dialogue between Science and Orthodoxy: Specificity and Possibilities," *Journal for Interdisciplinary Research on Religion and Science*, No. 6 (January, 2010): 48ff.